

Govt. rehabilitates and free 43 LTTEers-now they are fishermen.  
(1993, July 16). *The Island*.

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COLOMBO, July 15 — Forty-three Tamil rebel suspects have been freed from Sri Lankan custody after undergoing a rehabilitation course that included training in various professions, a government official said on Thursday.

A spokesman for the Office of the Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation said the men, mostly fishermen, were taught modern fishing methods and woodwork for five months at a rehabilitation centre.

Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Nanda Mathew told the 43 at a ceremony on Wednesday that their freedom was unconditional and unconnected to stalled negotiations over the release of 33 policemen held in rebel custody.

"The Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas) should also release their captives unconditionally", the minister said.

Six policemen among the 39 detained by the Tigers for the past three years were freed last month after the government agreed to allow some banned goods including fuel and fertiliser through to the rebel region in the north.

But the rebels went back on the promise of releasing the other 33 policemen, insisting more stocks of banned goods should be sent first.

An earlier agreement to exchange 39 rebel suspects held in military custody for the policemen also broke down.

The 43 rebel suspects released were the first to be rehabilitated by the government. They came to the centre five months ago in chains after being detained by the military for about one-and-a-half years.

The rebels are fighting for a separate state in the north and the east for minority Tamils. — Reuter